
Is This What We Mean by Big Data?



Data and Knowledge for Greater Impact in the Arab Region
Report on AFF 2016 Data Coalition Outcomes and
2017 Goals and Priorities Roadmap

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Overview

Through the leadership of the Arab Foundations Forum (AFF), philanthropy within the Arab region has recognized the importance and value of data and knowledge in the success and impact of its grant-making and program implementation, and has recently mobilized to undertake work on data, knowledge issues, and identifying opportunities. AFF is a regional membership-based association of foundations that aims to support an effective and strategic philanthropic sector in the Arab region that engages with all aspects of society towards growing social responsibility and investment, while advancing public good.

The Arab region, however, lacks an organized framework for collecting, processing, and sharing reliable and comparable data on philanthropy. In order to help meet this need, in 2016 AFF mobilized philanthropy in the region to take action collectively, with the support of the Foundation Center and the American University in Cairo.

In Tunis in September 2016 the AFF organized a workshop on ‘Data and Research - Making Data Serve Your Needs’ at its Annual Meeting and General Assembly, which brought together over 20 foundations and trusts to share learnings on the biggest data challenges and best practices. Following this, AFF held a second workshop at its Members and Partners Meeting in November 2016 in Abu Dhabi to convene members for a ‘Data Working Group’ to initiate development of a strategy for a sub-group of AFF members to work on data and knowledge in 2017 and beyond.

Over the course of these meetings, participants identified that they need to leverage the collective knowledge and convening power of AFF as a group, and need to operate with a shared commitment to this work. That means shifting away from the traditional outsourcing approach. It became clear that among AFF members there is interest in creating a data coalition. From the suggestions put forward at both meetings, several potential focus areas arose as priorities for work that could constitute a 5 year plan. These include:

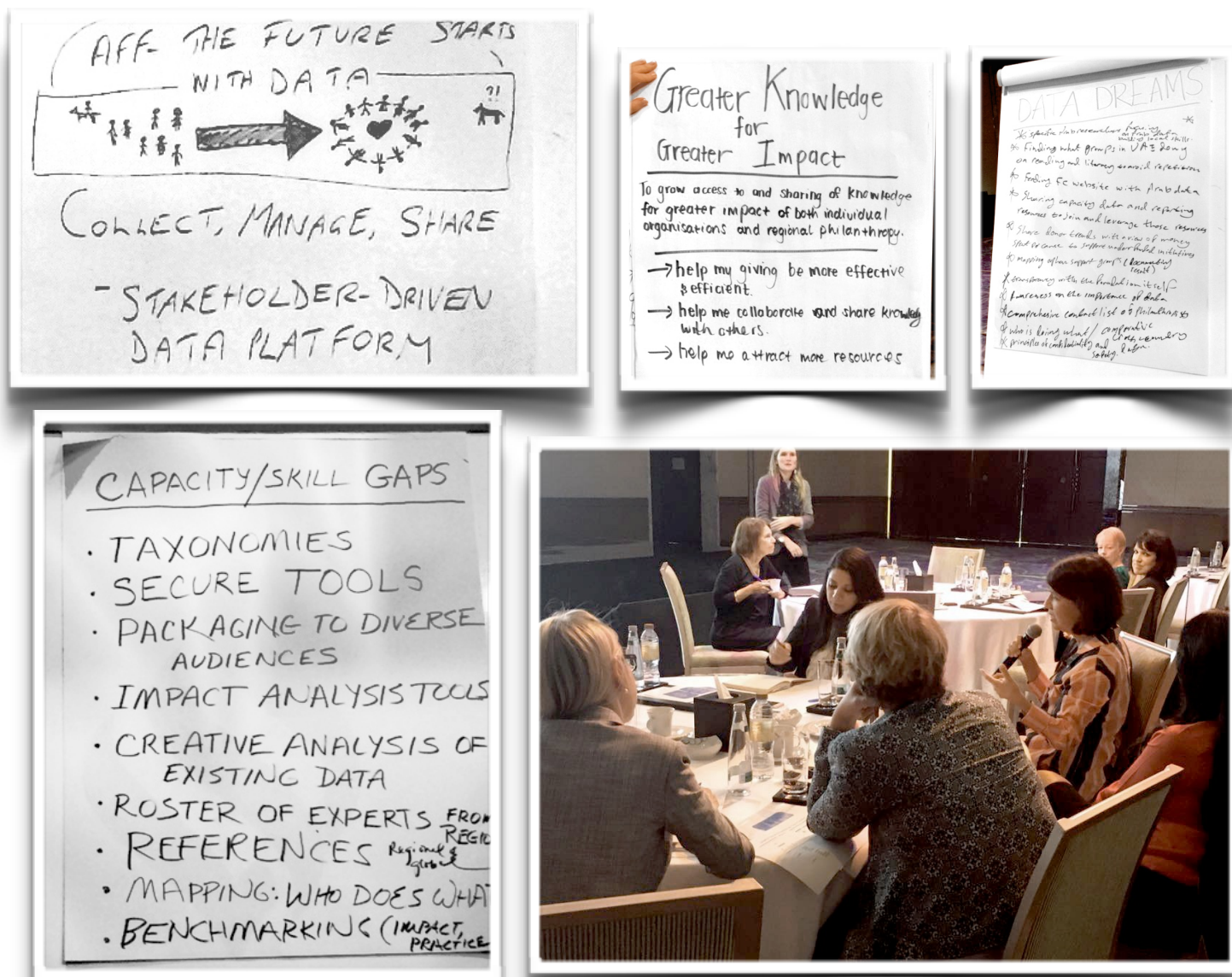
- Developing skills locally within foundations and individual researchers to collect, process, and analyze data, as well as fuller utilization of existing skills in the region

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- Highlighting the importance of and creating awareness around philanthropic data and knowledge within and external to the sector (the “value proposition”)
 - Gathering and presenting data to highlight who is doing what and where - both philanthropy / philanthropists, as well as related support organizations
 - Creating and sharing better data on financial flows and impact to better understand donor trends and gaps, and how to achieve greater impact
 - Improving appropriate access to data by and for the sector and researchers
 - Feeding other regional and international data portals such as Foundation Center Maps with Arab region data for integration into the broader global philanthropy picture
 - Establishing the principles for data management for philanthropy to combat a range of issues, including but not limited to those related to security, confidentiality, etc.

"The Data Workshop is designed in an interactive manner where we try to move beyond a conversation about what we wish we had in terms of data to support Arab philanthropy. The objective is to stimulate collective thinking about how we can use the talent and energy and resources of the people in this room (and others connected to AFF) to really make data collaboration a reality for our region"

Barbara Ibrahim

Scene: Developing skills locally within foundations and individual researchers to collect, process, and analyze data, as well as fuller utilization of existing skills in the region.



"We're building on the last meeting with the idea of moving forward, putting together a plan of action for 2017 with the contribution of the members in this room. This workshop aims to get the collective brain power of the participants to think about what they want to do in the region and how can we move the conversation forward to get to concrete action items "

Lauren Bradford

Data Dreams for the Region (Five Year Plan)

In order to think big and be bold at a high level, before narrowing down to detail, participants in the data coalition were encouraged to envision possible solutions to their data needs by sharing their long term data dreams. These often included having the ability to find out what other people are doing (who's doing what and where?) in a systematic way to lessen redundancy. Others included:

- Feeding Foundation Center mapping platform with Arab data to contribute to the global picture of philanthropy
- Creating and sharing data skills and capacity and reporting resources to join and leverage each other
- Sharing of donor trends in giving, with a view to highlighting money spent per cause and where are the underfunded initiatives
- Mapping support organization serving different sectors (CSOs, social entrepreneurs, groups with special needs. (Documenting results)
- Using data to encourage greater transparency within foundations themselves
- Awareness of the importance of data and a comprehensive contact list of philanthropists
- Establishing principles of data confidentiality and safety
- Identifying Arab researchers focusing on philanthropy data and building local skills

Challenges and Needs, What is Missing?

To have a collective sense of the challenges and needs faced by philanthropy in the Arab region that will need to be overcome in order to build a knowledge strategy and achieve the data dreams, participants shared their biggest data and knowledge challenges. These will require a strong focus from the group going forward, and form a component of the data and knowledge strategy. They include:

- Time
- Technology
- Access
- Lack of expertise
- Lack of capacity
- Cost
- Precision
- Safety
- Security
- Sharing

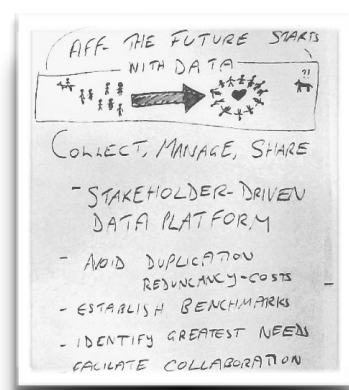
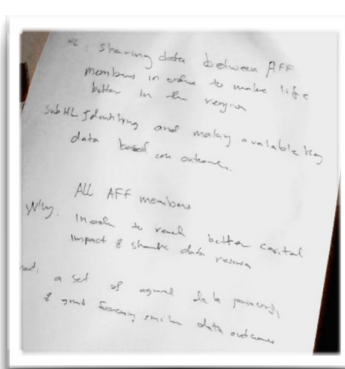
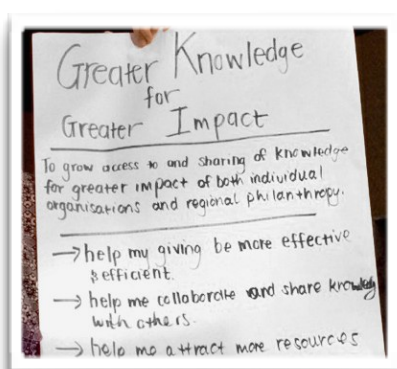
In order to face these challenges, a number of needs were also identified by the group, which are crucial to the data and knowledge strategy, and include:

- The need for an agreed upon multilingual taxonomy (Arabic/ English/ French)
- Secure Tools to protect data.
- The ability to package data for diverse audiences. We are good at collecting data but weaker on how to convey it effectively to policy makers and different stakeholder groups.

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- Impact analysis tools.
 - Creative analysis of existing data.
 - Roster of experts from the region.
 - Institutional Mapping (who's doing what and where?)
 - Benchmarking and creating a baseline for measuring impact
 - Models for sharing sensitive data
 - Nonprofit Accounting.
 - Grant-making budgeting.
 - Data Quality tools.
 - Programs to assist better research.

The Case for Data - Creating a Value Proposition

The establishment of a strong, clear and articulate data value proposition from the outset, will help Arab philanthropy to move its data and knowledge strategy forward with much greater ease. A value proposition helps to build a compelling case for data, raises awareness of the value of having quality data, and signals the importance of taking a collective approach to data collection in the region. To develop a data value proposition, the participants worked in small groups on several draft propositions to flesh out the key messages. These are shown below, followed by a synthesized version for finalization and use by AFF and the data coalition.



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| Headline: Greater Knowledge for Greater Impact | Headline: Sharing data between AFF members in order to make life better in the region | Headline: AFF - The Future Starts with Data (Collect, Manage, Share) |
| Sub Headline: To grow access to and sharing of knowledge for greater impact of both individual organizations and regional philanthropy. | Sub Headline: Identifying and making the data available based on outcomes | Sub Headline: Stakeholder Driven Data Platform |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help my giving be more effective and efficient • Help me collaborate and share knowledge with other • Help me attract more resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to have better impact and share data resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid duplication and redundancy costs • Establish benchmarks • Identify greatest needs • Facilitate collaboration |

Based on member feedback at the AGM in Tunis in September 2016, here are some of your thoughts on the value proposition of data:

- “A better future for all starts with data and knowledge for greater impact”
- Collect, manage, share
- Arab philanthropy – making data and knowledge available to improve impact, collaboration and efficiency through a stakeholder-driven data platform
- Makes my giving more effective
- Helps me to partner with relevant peers
- Helps me to be strategic

Data Sharing Starts with a Culture of Sharing

(What are you willing to share?)

To share data and knowledge, and create a culture for doing so, it is best to start with what is easy and comfortable. To this end, most participants agreed that they would be willing to share the below information in the short term with AFF, while they continue to build consensus on how and when to share what may be deemed as more sensitive data, within the region:

- 2017 foundation budget
- Funding Sources i.e. individual, family, corporate set-aside, government, etc.
- Annual reports
- Achievements based on KPIs (Standardization/ Dashboards)
- Project Priorities (Thematic level rather than an institutional level as a starting point)
- Strategic plan overview
- Impact data/ program evaluations
- SDG alignment/ recording projects against SDGs
- Failures
- Values and principles of operation

* This list will be further discussed and amended in light of the outcomes of the AFF members' survey in 2017

Next Steps

AFF will continue to partner with Foundation Center and The American University of Cairo to develop and implement the program of the data coalition. All AFF members are invited to participate going forward to achieve the goals and priorities outlined in this report.

As a first step, AFF will conduct a survey with its members, expecting them to participate by sharing some uniform data to highlight the profile of each member and its key activities. The survey results will be shared with members and partners at the aggregate level initially (and anonymously) as part of AFF's commitment to knowledge sharing. A further discussion will then take place in 2017 to decide collectively on the best way to use and share the granular data. Questions remain around what level of comfort exists in sharing disaggregated data or using it to develop an online portal or mapping.

The suggested timing and venue for the next Data Coalition meeting is May, 2017 either in Cairo, Egypt or Ras El Kheima, UAE. AFF looks forward to working with its members and partners on implementing the data roadmap in the Arab region and welcomes comments or suggestions to enhance this work.